

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

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Cover Story

Latino activists join with marriage activists.

Will it work?

Inclusion

By The Reverend Irene Monroe

BC Editorial Board

Note: Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) is honoring Reverend Irene Monroe at their 13th Annual Spirit of Justice Award Dinner on Friday, October 26th in Boston!

As an African American feminist theologian, Rev. Irene speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. She is being honored for her life-long work advancing the public conversation about race, gender, and sexual orientation; in particular for encouraging the LGBT community to confront racism; and the African American community to confront homophobia.

Based in Boston, GLAD's work – from its marriage equality victories in Goodridge and Kerrigan, to its triumph in the U.S. Tax Court on behalf of a transgender woman, to its recent challenges to the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) – makes it a leader in the fight to end discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, HIV status, and gender identity and expression nationwide.

Click [here](#) to make a gift to GLAD and show your support for Rev. Irene.

The kerfuffle concerning undocumented immigrants and legalizing same-sex marriage are usually competing and unresolved hot-button issues for voters heading toward the ballot box. Immigration advocates and LGBTQ rights groups have long tried to get its constituencies working together.

Historically, the efforts have been abysmal.

But organizations like Casa de Maryland, a community organization advocating for undocumented immigrants has formed an alliance with Equality Maryland and the Latino GLBT History Project.

This might be the first such alliance in the country. Voter outcome of this alliance will determine its success.

The alliance, albeit not an uncontentious union, will allow proponents for in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants and/or same-sex marriage to pull support from each other's base at the ballot box.

Theoretically the move is brilliant. It's a strength-through-unity approach.

Citing an April report from the Pew Hispanic Center, it revealed that 59 percent of Latinos accept lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) Americans. And a report released by the National Council of La Raza and Social Science Research Solutions in April found that 54 percent of Hispanics support same-sex marriage, a higher percentage than the general population. And certainly a far greater percentage than in my community.

In 2008, according to the Pew Research Center, approximately 95 percent of the African American populace cast their ballot for Obama, and only 26 percent were in favor of same-sex marriage.

Before Obama publicly announced his support for marriage equality in May, according to Pew results in April, 49 percent of African Americans were not in favor of same-sex marriage while only 39 percent were. And since Obama's announcement endorsing marriage equality some African American ministers have come out more vociferously against Obama.

Similarly, conservative Latino religious leaders are strong opponents against marriage equality and have come out forcefully against the alliance.

"Why does man want to redefine what God already established?" Paredes yelled as the congregation nodded and clapped. "Man is not the inventor of marriage! God is!"

The Rev. Heber D. Paredes of Iglesia Roca de la Eternidad, a Hispanic Pentecostal church in Landover Hills, espouses a typical and uninformed statement about marriage. Like most religious homophobes he's a prominent cleric in conservative circles and his influence is far-reaching. His community clout with parishioners is as strong and powerful as that of African American ministers.

These Latino religious leaders see the alliance of immigration and same-sex marriage as a ballot box initiative not only as exploitative, but also as a deal with the devil—they feel deeply betrayed. Do they have to compromise their theological beliefs to gain legal documentation.?

Religiously conservative families feel Casa has veered from its mission in order to promulgate a gay agenda under the guise of helping Latino immigrants, or as the only way it will help Latino immigrants.

"It surprises me," said Maria Delgado, 30, of Hyattsville, who was attending services with her six children. "Because really they help people to work, they help people with families."

Casa has provided immigrant services to Latino families through the years. Founded in 1985, Casa "was created in response to the human needs of the thousands of Central Americans arriving to the D.C. area after fleeing wars and civil strife in their countries of origin."

Overlooked and too often not reported on are the thousands of Central Americans coming to the U.S. fleeing anti-gay persecution. These Central Americans are not only here because of the civil wars going on in their countries but they are also here because of their sexual orientation, or trans identity or HIV status.

Central American countries like Panama, Nicaragua, Belize, Honduras, to name just a few, do not allow its LGBTQ citizens to serve openly in the military, or recognize same-sex unions, marriages and adoptions. And none of these countries have a hate crime bill.

But attitudes and times are changing for a younger generation. Younger generations of LGBTQ Central Americans here in the states

are not only coming out to their families but they are helping others in their communities to come out. Because they see the intersectionality of oppressions it that makes easier for them to form alliances.

For example, a gay, undocumented immigrant from Guatemala, Edwin Guil, 22, says he is used to being discriminated against. But when a gay friend recently said he was not going to vote for President Obama because of his program to stop deporting some undocumented immigrant youths, Guil, a college student, decided it was time for some cross-cultural education.

The future for disenfranchised groups to thrive is to form alliances, ones that not only strengthens their causes, but ones that genuinely unites us across our difference.

The Latino community in Maryland is operating, as least theoretically, within a paradigm we social justice activists espouse.

Come November, the voter outcome will determine the success of the alliance forged with Casa de Maryland, Equality Maryland and Latino GLBT History Project. The proof will be in the pudding.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member and Columnist, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. She is the Coordinator of the African-American Roundtable of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) at the Pacific School of Religion. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. She was recently named to MSNBC's list of [10 Black Women You Should Know](#). Reverend Monroe is the author of [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for Not'So'Everyday Moments](#). As an African-American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is irenemonroe.com. Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.

